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# THE IDEAS AND THE MEN

THAT CREATED THE

## UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA.

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### AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA ON CHARTER DAY,  
FEBRUARY 15, 1881.

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BY

PROF. SAMUEL AUGHEY, PH.D., LL.D.

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LINCOLN, NEB.:

JOURNAL COMPANY, STATE PRINTERS.

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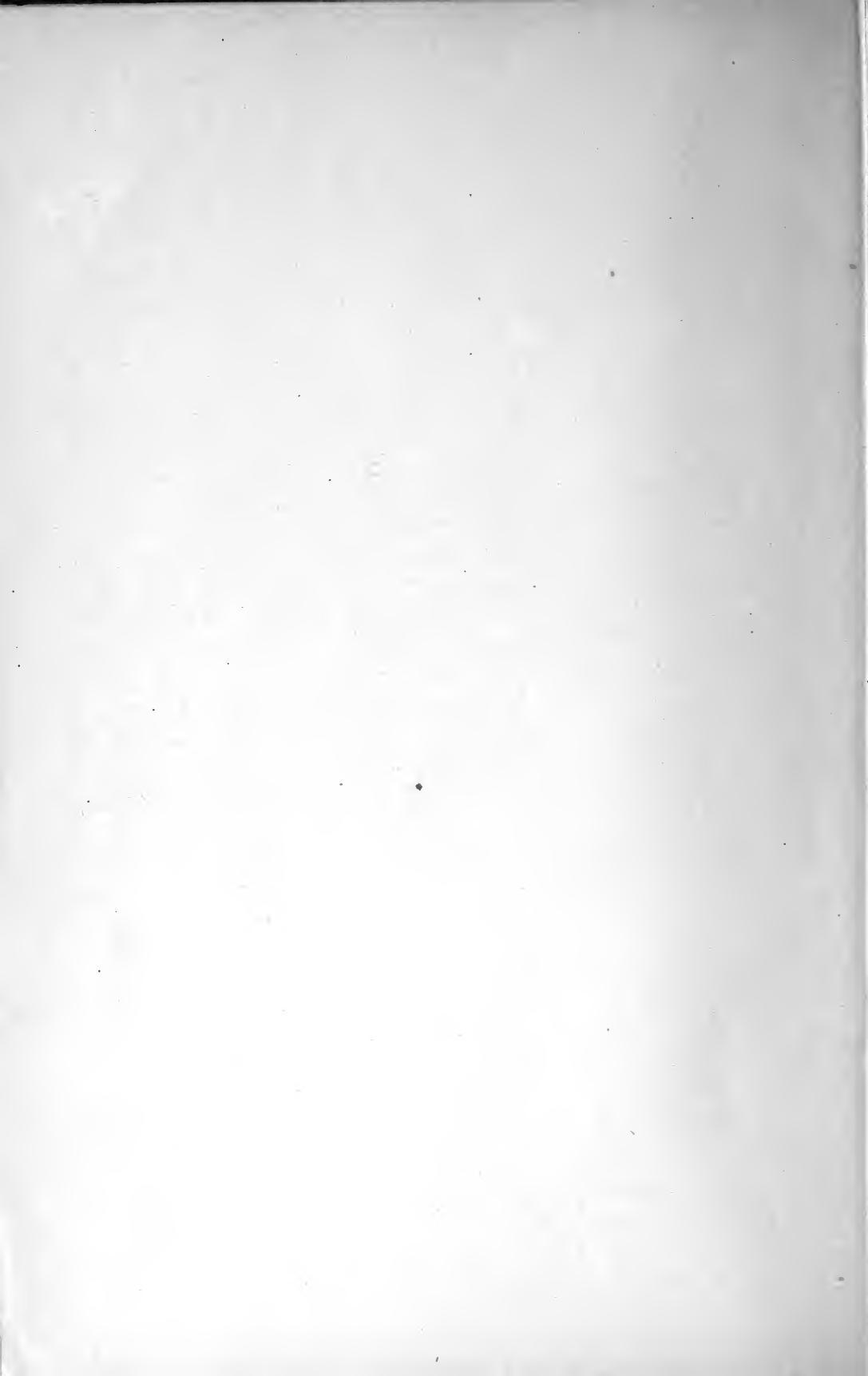
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At the Faculty meeting of Feb. 16, 1881, Prof. G. E. Woodberry offered the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted:

*Resolved*, That the thanks of the Faculty be tendered to Prof. Aughey for the valuable address delivered by him upon "Charter Day," 1881, and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the address for publication.

GEO. E. HOWARD,  
*Sec. of the Faculty.*



# THE IDEAS AND THE MEN

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA.

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The territorial legislature of 1865 and 1866 prepared a State Constitution, which was submitted to the people June 2d, 1866. It was preceded by a somewhat bitter discussion. Among the arguments urged for its adoption was the fact that the sooner it was accomplished the finer the lands that could be obtained for educational and internal improvement purposes. After the vote was taken the Constitution was declared carried. One of the provisions of the enabling act was that lands for an Agricultural College and University must be accepted within three years, and colleges opened within five years afterwards. The trust was accepted by the State, and it received from the general government the promised gift. It is questionable whether the lands for internal improvements were wisely expended. Fortunately, however, the lands for the endowment of the Agricultural College and University remain comparatively intact, and a wise provision of law prevents them from being squandered. The leasing and sale of them is so regulated as ultimately to secure a princely endowment for these institutions.

The legislature that met in January, 1869, passed an act on the 15th of February—twelve years ago—to establish a State University, vesting its government in a Board of Regents, to be appointed, in the first instance, by the gov-

ernor, who was ex-officio chairman; the superintendent of public instruction and the chancellor of the university being also members of the board. Under the new constitution the government is vested, as is well known, in a board of six regents, whose terms of office last six years, two new ones being elected every two years by the people. Previous to this—June 14th, 1867—in the act for locating the seat of government, the agricultural college and the state university were united.

By an act of Feb. 15th, 1869, the governor, secretary of state, and auditor were appointed to sell the unsold blocks in Lincoln owned by the State, and to locate and erect a university building. Of the sum realized in this way, \$100,000 was appropriated for this purpose. On the following first of June the plans and specifications prepared by M. J. McBird, then of Logansport, Indiana, were accepted by the capital commissioners for the university building. These plans were submitted to the board of regents June 3d, 1869, and accepted, subject to any modifications which they might suggest. The contract for building was given to D. J. Silvers & Son, of Logansport, Indiana, on the same day. About the middle of July, the contractors commenced work, and the walls were so far completed by September 23d that the corner stone could be laid, which was done with Masonic ceremonies, under the management of the grand lodge of the State. The committee of citizens who had charge of the ceremonies raised a subscription among themselves and hired a band in Omaha for \$375 and expenses. They traveled here all the way from Omaha in carriages. A free banquet to all the citizens from abroad was also given by the people, at their own expense. The basement was completed during the first week in December. In the meantime the architect had made such changes and amendments in the plan of the building

as the regents had indicated. These changes greatly increased the cost of the building. The contract for completing the university was finally given to D. J. Silver & Son, in pursuance of advertisements, for \$128,480, which, with the previous cost of the excavation and basement, made the entire cost \$152,000.

The contractors for the University pushed the work with remarkable energy. At this day it is hard to realize the disadvantages under which they labored. The lumber was shipped from Chicago to East Nebraska City, four miles east of the Missouri in Iowa, opposite to the present Nebraska City. It was hauled to Lincoln in wagons, over wretched roads, a distance of sixty-five miles. The contractors paid \$10 a cord for wood with which to burn brick, and which was hauled from twenty to thirty-five miles. On April 7, 1870, the brick work was commenced, and though there was an interruption of three weeks for want of brick, the walls were completed and the roof on by the middle of the following August. In eighty-two days 1,500,000 brick were made and put in these University walls. The University building has from that time been under the guardianship of the Board of Regents. They determined to open it the year following its completion. By their permission this chapel was used for various literary entertainments, up to the time of its formal opening, on September 7, 1871.\*

#### A RETROSPECT.

Here let us pause to consider the step which this then infant State took in undertaking the establishment of a University. When the bill establishing a University be-

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\* For fuller details of the events attending the erection of the University building, see Hon. C. H. Gere's centennial history of Lancaster county. Many of the facts above detailed are taken from that work.

came law on February 15th, 1869, the population was barely 100,000. Even the few high schools that existed could barely prepare students for the freshman class, and very few students anywhere were in such stage of preparation. The state, too, was mainly settled by persons of comparatively small means, seeking homes for themselves and families. Little of the prairie had yet been brought under agricultural subjection. The state was rich prospectively, but really poor practically. And yet it was proposed to establish such an institution several years in advance of the time required by the United States law, in order to hold the large grants of land for the support of the Agricultural College and University. Under these circumstances many claimed that it would be wiser to wait for an increase in population and wealth, and the building up of preparatory schools before inaugurating such an enterprise. Others again wished to relegate the higher education wholly to the Christian denominations, by whom for generations it had been controlled in the eastern states.

Against these arguments, on the other hand, it was urged that a new state could not too early establish the higher educational institutions. That the most distinguished colleges in the east originated during the infancy of the commonwealths which they have made glorious; that Massachusetts, for example, owes her political and intellectual glory to the fact that Harvard has for generations, and from its earliest history, been training her sons; that Yale performed the same duty for another colony, and is now great because she, too, began her career so early in the history of the commonwealth which she also is making illustrious. There were others, too, who felt at that time, and urged it upon the people of the State, that the time had come when an advance should be made on traditional methods of education. The state had provided a magnificent free school system. To

perfect that scheme, the higher education needed to be furnished to the youth of the state on the same terms as the common schools provided elementary instruction. To do this, a University was needed—a University “by the people and for the people”—an institution which should be expressive of the intellectual life, not of the past or present, but of all time. To accomplish this, an institution was needed where pre-eminently the scientific spirit should obtain. By the scientific spirit is not meant a mere study of the sciences so called. Scientific methods are applicable to all studies—to literature and languages, as well as to metaphysics, political economy, natural history, and physics. The scientific spirit pre-eminently makes its inductions from facts—facts in nature, in consciousness, in language, in the life of a people, and the development of an epoch. It does not depend merely on facts which are tangible to the senses, but on those also which can be seen only with the mental eye. Leibnitz and Newton, Cuvier, Lyell, and Agassiz, were types of the former, while Plato, Shakespeare, and Emerson are representatives of the latter. Shakespeare saw things intuitively which others reached only by a laborious process of reasoning. A few facts in history, which thousands knew better than himself, but whose conditioning law they could not see, sufficed to suggest to him those marvelous creations that will never die. He is the greatest philosopher, because the greatest creator or poet of all time.

This scientific spirit is pre-eminently the spirit of our epoch. It is the spirit that is revolutionizing our times. It builds our railroads, bridges, telegraph lines, uniting society by the telephone, and turning darkness into light by electricity. It culls the best thoughts of the literature of ages, and illumines them with a pure, divine light. It goes to the bottom of the causes that condition the phenomena of the material, the human and intellectual universe, until it gains

competency to say, not how things are, or ought to be, but how things must be to be true and enduring. The soul, so permeated, becomes creative, original, and possesses spontaneous understanding in the highest degree of the great problems that are now coming into the consciousness of the race. Hence the modern University, that possesses the true scientific spirit, prompts to those actions and endowments that lead to original investigation and self-dependence—the spirit and character eminently fitted and becoming New America and especially the New West.

There were many advanced spirits in Nebraska even at that early day. They realized that culture was something desirable for its own sake. Prairies indeed had to be subdued, but other interests besides that of the dollar were most desirable, and among these culture in distinction from mere knowledge, technical or general, was regarded as most important.

There was another class more limited than the former in influence and numbers, that desired a University solely because of the advertisement which it would give the state abroad. They held, and that truthfully, that an institution of learning of high grade would attract the cultivated emigrants into our borders, and be the most powerful factor in securing the settlement of this infant commonwealth.

Others again, and this was a still smaller class, a class that had received a one-sided impulse, by a narrow range of reading and study, could see no good in a university unless its professors devoted themselves wholly to studies in natural history or physics. They pointed to the unstudied resources of this new state, to its comparatively unknown botany, zoology, and geology, and claimed that the making known what the state was and could be made to be in these particulars was itself justification enough for the establishment of a university.

The fact that the infancy of nations is often literary creative periods was not overlooked during these discussions. Nothing is better known than that the most illustrious Greek classics were produced during the youth of the Hellenic people. The experience of many other nations is parallel to that of Greece. The literary ripeness of a nation devotes itself more to criticism, when its youth was spent in founding institutions and in the creation of literary masterpieces.

It was through the dominance of such ideas as those recorded above that a public sentiment was created that justified, amid some opposition, the establishment on the part of the state of this university.

#### THE WORK OF YOUNG MEN.

It should also ever be remembered that the public sentiment that established the university was mainly created by young or comparatively young men. The early legislatures of the state were principally made up of such. These young men were exceptionally able and enterprising, and came here to help create a commonwealth when the effort meant personal risk, sacrifice, and toil of unusual severity. To reach Nebraska twenty years ago involved the crossing of Iowa in stage coaches through a sparsely settled region for half the distance, or a longer and more tortuous journey by boat from St. Louis. Many of the young men who came here at that early day have reached great distinction in the professions, in business, or in politics. I need only to refer to Hon. J. M. Woolworth, A. J. Poppleton, E. S. Dundy, of the U. S. court, C. Briggs, O. P. Mason, T. M. Marquett, and others who have won great distinction at the bar or on the bench, or both. Dr. Geo. L. Miller, J. Sterling Morton, R. W. Furnas, J. M. McMurphy, Bishop Talbot, Lieut. Isaac

T. Webster (now professor of Military Science in this University) and brother, and Prof. Dake, of blessed memory, also came early, and the most of them at the first organization of the territory. Ex-Senator Hitchcock, and the present U. S. senators, were also among the first settlers of the state. These, then young men, and others to whom I cannot even allude, who have since won great distinction, and possessed abilities and character to make them marked in any state, moulded this young commonwealth. The most of them have been, and still are, the warm friends and supporters of this University, and no better evidence of this can be given than the eloquent and able literary addresses with which they honored us on opening and on commencement occasions. Every lawyer and every judge knows that the statutes framed by the young men referred to in the early legislatures of the state, while yet a territory, are remarkably luminous and able compared with the laws which have been enacted in our later history.

The men who passed the bill establishing the University of Nebraska in the legislature of 1869 demonstrate the truth of what I have just said. The bill originated in the senate, and was known as senate file No. 86. It was introduced by E. E. Cunningham, then of Richardson county, afterwards surveyor general of Nebraska, and now engaged in successful mining operations in the Black Hills. It was referred to the education committee, of which Hon. C. H. Gere, now again in the senate, was chairman. He reported favorably, and at its final passage in the senate on February 13th, every member, democrat and republican, voted for the bill. Besides the above the following individuals were members of that senate, namely C. J. Myers, Isham Reavis, T. Ashton, T. B. Stevenson, W. F. Chapin, J. W. Frost, Wm. F. Goodwill, and Guy C. Barnum. Those familiar with our state history will remember the conspicuous part

that many of these men have taken since in the affairs of the state. In the house the university bill fared equally well. On its final passage, February 15th, 1869—twelve years ago—it received the vote of every member. Though there has been much discussion since within the Republican party, and between the two great parties (there were no Greenbackers then), as to the wisdom of this measure, and as to the way in which this measure has been carried into practice, there was no controversy over its original passage in either house that resulted in a single negative vote.

Any statements concerning the early history of this university would be defective without acknowledgments of indebtedness to the patriotic, public-spirited, and noble character of the founders of the state and this institution. With our present magnificent population and resources, the people are apt to forget the early intellectual and social workers in the state. No political, sectional, or other feeling or interest, however, should prevent us from giving honor to whom so much and so great honor is due.

#### THE FIRST CHANCELLOR.

The university having been founded at the time indicated, it will be interesting to consider some of the men to whom the first board of regents entrusted its educational work. First and foremost among these stands the first chancellor of the university, Dr. A. R. Benton. He was in many respects a most remarkable character. The circumstances connected with his election to the chancellorship illustrate alike his modesty and his high sense of personal honor. Rev. D. R. Dungan, then a regent of the university, of his own accord, first opened a correspondence with him on the subject, and suggested to him the advisability of being a candidate for the office of chancellor. He consented, but

took no steps to secure the position save a reference of Mr. Dungan to his friends in Indiana who were cognizant of his educational work. Among these friends were Hon. O. P. Morton, Hon. A. J. Porter, first comptroller of the treasury, E. B. Martindale, trustee of the Purdue University, and many others. So little, however, did the matter weigh with him that he in the meantime accepted the presidency of the Northwestern Christian University, over which he had before presided for seven years, after having long been a professor in the college. He was therefore taken by surprise when, in the beginning of 1871, he was notified of his election to the chancellorship of the university. He was invited to meet the regents about February 7th, 1871, for mutual acquaintance and consultation, and to decide as far as possible as to the opening of the university. He was also invited to deliver a popular address, which invitation was accepted. Meeting the regents at the appointed time, he frankly told them he regarded his election as a great compliment, but that he gave them perfect liberty to rescind their action in his case, or to choose another for the position. He wished them to have perfect liberty, after personal acquaintance, to do what seemed to them best for the university. He also gave advice as to salaries, especially that of chancellor, which he considered, under the circumstances of a new state like Nebraska, altogether too high. He wished them to retrieve any false step which they had taken in the election of chancellor. In other words, he was ready to sacrifice his own interests for those of the university, if, in the opinion of any of the regents, the two interests were in conflict.

At this February meeting the time for opening the university was not fixed; this was done at a meeting in the following April, when it was resolved to commence operations on the 7th of the following September. Dr. Benton

returned to Indianapolis and succeeded in cancelling his engagement with the N. W. C. University. He removed to Nebraska in May, and at once set about the work of the university, which consisted then in remodeling the rooms, estimating purchases, arranging courses of study, and advertising the opening and the advantages of the university by lectures.

I shall never forget my first interview with Chancellor Benton. He wished me to select a room which would answer the double purpose of a lecture room and work room, where the experiments should be prepared to illustrate the chemical lectures; for it had already been decided that though my chair was that of the natural sciences, I should also fill that of chemistry until the growth of the university should justify the election of a tutor or a professor for that department. While looking over the university with him the regret was expressed that no provision had been made in the way of room for laboratories. During that walk we decided on the arrangement which has lasted till now—which we had hoped should be temporary—namely, to arrange the room now occupied by tutor Little and the present laboratory and the philosophical apparatus room for the purpose indicated.

The long looked for and anxiously expected 7th of September finally arrived. If I remember correctly, about 70 students made their appearance on that morning. After chapel exercises the first faculty meeting was held in this hall. We sat in this right hand corner—five of us, namely: Chancellor Benton, Prof. O. C. Dake, Manly, Church, and myself. That was the beginning of the *faculty love feasts*, that have been held with more or less regularity every week during term time to the present time. On extraordinary occasions these love feasts have been held daily. At the close of the first faculty meeting Manly asked me

what I thought of the enterprise and attempt that we were about to make to found a university. I will not here give my reply. Suffice it to say that all felt that the greatest responsibilities rested on them, and that we were all under obligations to make an extraordinary effort to compel success. That first year was an extremely hard one. All the teachers were overworked. I taught six hours a day besides having the care of the chemical department and the founding of a museum. The chancellor, Prof. Dake, and Church, worked equally hard. I wish, however, particularly to speak of Chancellor Benton. What I have already said in part illustrates the nobleness of his character. He was remarkably considerate of the feelings of his associates. I never knew him to wound the feelings of a professor intentionally under any provocation. He meant to be exactly just, and never was more happy than when he could help or confer a favor on his fellow workers. He uniformly was careful to preserve their good name. He was exceedingly cautious and careful, and watched with a most vigilant eye all the interests of the university. He had financing abilities of a high order, and never ran himself into debt, and discouraged the contracting of them by all—university and students. He carried this spirit to such an extent that some of the friends of the university imagined that he was lacking in public spirit. His plans and his spirit, however, have stood the test of time, and few, if any, at this period, who are conversant with all the facts of that time, attach blame to his methods.

Amid all the trials which his work involved, he always found time to prosecute the studies of his life. His scholarship was accurate and broad. Familiar with the classics, the amenities of literature occupied much of his attention. He was well posted with the progress of science, and familiar with the profound biological and philosophical dis-

cussions which distinguish our epoch. He shone in the recitation room, and especially in those departments that represented the different chairs that he had filled. In fact, so varied was his scholarship that he was equally at home in almost every department of college work. He made every object luminous by the clearness of his analysis. In popular address, when using a manuscript, he rarely did justice to himself; but his productions uniformly read remarkably well. When, however, he dispensed with a manuscript, he spoke with rare eloquence and power. To me the most remarkable feature of his lectures was their accuracy, elegance, and clearness. Nothing slovenly ever appeared from his tongue or pen. I never knew a man so entirely free from exaggeration. No fact or statement was ever colored by him. Every member of the faculty, every citizen that formed his acquaintance, at once trusted implicitly every word that he uttered. Neat in person, pure in thought, clear in intellect, studious in life, courteous to a remarkable degree, the charm of the social circle, he was a model Christian, scholar, and gentleman.

As would naturally be expected from such a character, he constantly improved on acquaintance. Amid the turbulence of the times, concerned only to do his duty, and immeasurably more interested in the success of the university than in himself, he was gaining slowly but surely during all the years that he was here, in the good opinion of the people. He was more popular than at any time before, with those who knew him, when he left the state to return to the scenes of his early labor and triumphs. I need not say here what is so well known, that he was universally beloved by the students.

I consider, therefore, that the university was exceedingly fortunate in its first head. With a less cautious, careful, well-balanced and able head, it might have failed. Under

his administration there was a regular and constant growth of the university, and his last year here was the most successful up to that time in its history. Unfortunately no catalogue was published at the close of his last year of the university management, as had previously been done, and from this circumstance the credit due to him at that time was not made known to the public. This omission to publish the final results of his labors for the university was an injustice to him which he felt much less keenly than his friends. Conscious of the high character of his own work, he was willing silently to await the arbitrament of time.

The success of the university during the chancellorship of Dr. Benton was the more remarkable, as difficulties unexpected and unforeseen arose that naturally greatly interfered with the attendance of students. Among these obstacles to success were the locust raids of 1872, '73 and '74. Owing to these raids the agricultural classes, which constitute the majority of the people, were financially straitened, and were unable to send their children to school away from home. At the same time occurred, or commenced, the great financial crisis of this decade, during which time shrinkage in the value of real estate and other property occurred to such an extent that many people who had been opulent were impoverished. That the university should grow during such times and under such circumstances is a remarkable feature in its history, and speaks volumes for its management and those who were doing its educational work. It should also be remembered that when the university was opened in 1871 the population of the state was only 133,000, and at the close of Chancellor Benton's administration in 1876 it had increased to 357,747. The per cent of students to the whole population has never been higher—seldom indeed so high. The first year it was almost one to every 1,000 of the population. The last

year it averaged almost the same. At the same rate we should now have an attendance during the year of 450 students.

## THE FIRST PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

One other character connected with the early history of the University deserves special mention. I refer to Prof. O. C. Dake, the first professor of English literature. Before his election to the chair which he adorned, he published a volume of poems, whose title was "Nebraska Legends." He found abundant materials here to inspire his muse, and loved to pour out his thoughts and emotions in inspired song. His reading was exhaustive, especially in literature and history, and in some departments of theology. For he had been an active priest in the Episcopal church, and was still in connection with that body. He was exceptionally open, candid, courageous, and impulsive. No man ever doubted where he stood, or what he thought. Tenacious in his opinions and convictions, he never took an unfair advantage of an opponent. Owing to his impulsive character, and sometimes speaking and writing without careful study, he laid himself open to attack. He was ready to give blows and also to receive them. His nature was so generous, sympathetic, and noble that no one could long remain in his society without loving him. The poetic temperament was his in a high degree. The second volume of poems which he published during his connection with the university demonstrated that his muse was increasing in intensity, brilliancy, and depth. It received many encomiums from literary critics. Had it been produced in the centres of literary activity, or any portion of the populous east, this volume, would have been sought, and the edition soon exhausted. The number, however, in

Nebraska at that time who appreciated and loved poetry for its own sake was comparatively small. And yet the number of educated people, compared to the whole population, was exceptionally high. Poetry, however, was not then "the rage." There were few who could give an independent judgment of the merits of a poem. Owing to this and other causes this volume, which contains many exquisite thoughts, attracted comparatively little attention. I have no doubt, however, that in the years to come, when there is a greater love for fine scholarship, and greater appreciation of culture, when the masses will be raised closer to Prof. Dake's level, his works will be sought, and resurrected from the comparative oblivion in which they are now buried. As an illustration of the character of the man I will quote his estimate of what manhood should be from his "Nebraska Legends:"

"Men grow by independent thought,  
Self-centred action unconstrained;  
Far greater he whose lines are wrought  
By purpose in himself contained  
Than he who, by another's will,  
Some petty place must daily fill—  
Some tiresome, endless, dull routine  
That makes him but a mere machine.  
Give me a hut with scanty cheer,  
Far on the blooming, wild frontier,  
A yoke of cattle and a cow,  
And acres of my own to plow—  
A dog, a gun, the sweet blue skies,  
And Nature's charms and mysteries;  
So I may ride, or sit, or play,  
Or read my book each stormy day;  
And I shall feel myself a king."

Had Prof. Dake's life been prolonged to the present, his genius would have produced riper and more luscious poetic fruit. At no time during his life was he developing so rapidly as during his last years. He frequently conversed

with me about the future, and sometimes expressed a longing desire to experience soon the glories of another life. His sensitive organization, susceptible to every physical and social influence, quivering constantly with pain or delight, rapidly wore itself out and prepared him for that attack of paralysis which removed him from earth.

But he still lives in the hearts of those whom he influenced for good, and in his works, which are destined to delight and cultivate more souls in the future than they have yet in the past.

THE FIRST PROFESSOR OF THE GREEK LANGUAGE AND  
LITERATURE.

If time permitted I would love to dwell on the work and character of Prof. S. H. Manly, who was a member of the first faculty of the university. Unfortunately for him he was suffering from nervous prostration when he came to the university, from which he never recovered. Much of the time while he was here he could only do partial work, his classes being heard principally by Prof. Church, and occasionally one by myself and Prof. Dake. Under these circumstances he could not do himself justice. He was, however, a fine Greek scholar, and his range of reading had been wide. He was singularly amiable, courteous, and generous. Few men have ever so constantly observed the amenities of life as Prof. Manly. Students universally loved him. There is no doubt whatever, had his health enabled him to prosecute his work with vigor, he would greatly have distinguished himself. Finding at last that there was no hope of his restoration while holding his professorship he resigned his chair early in 1875. Faculty students and regents parted from him with great regret. Invalid as he had been during the whole of his connection with the

university, he still exercised over it by the influence of his noble character the happiest influence.

#### OTHER EARLY PROFESSORS.

Professor Church, the only other original member of the faculty besides myself, who is still with us, fortunately for the university, is too close at hand to be done up in this address. I hope never to have that privilege, as in the order of nature I shall be gathered to my fathers before him. Professor Hitchcock, who came here in the second year of the university, and Professors Bailey and Thompson, who came still later, are so near to us in time that no discussion of them is called for on this occasion.

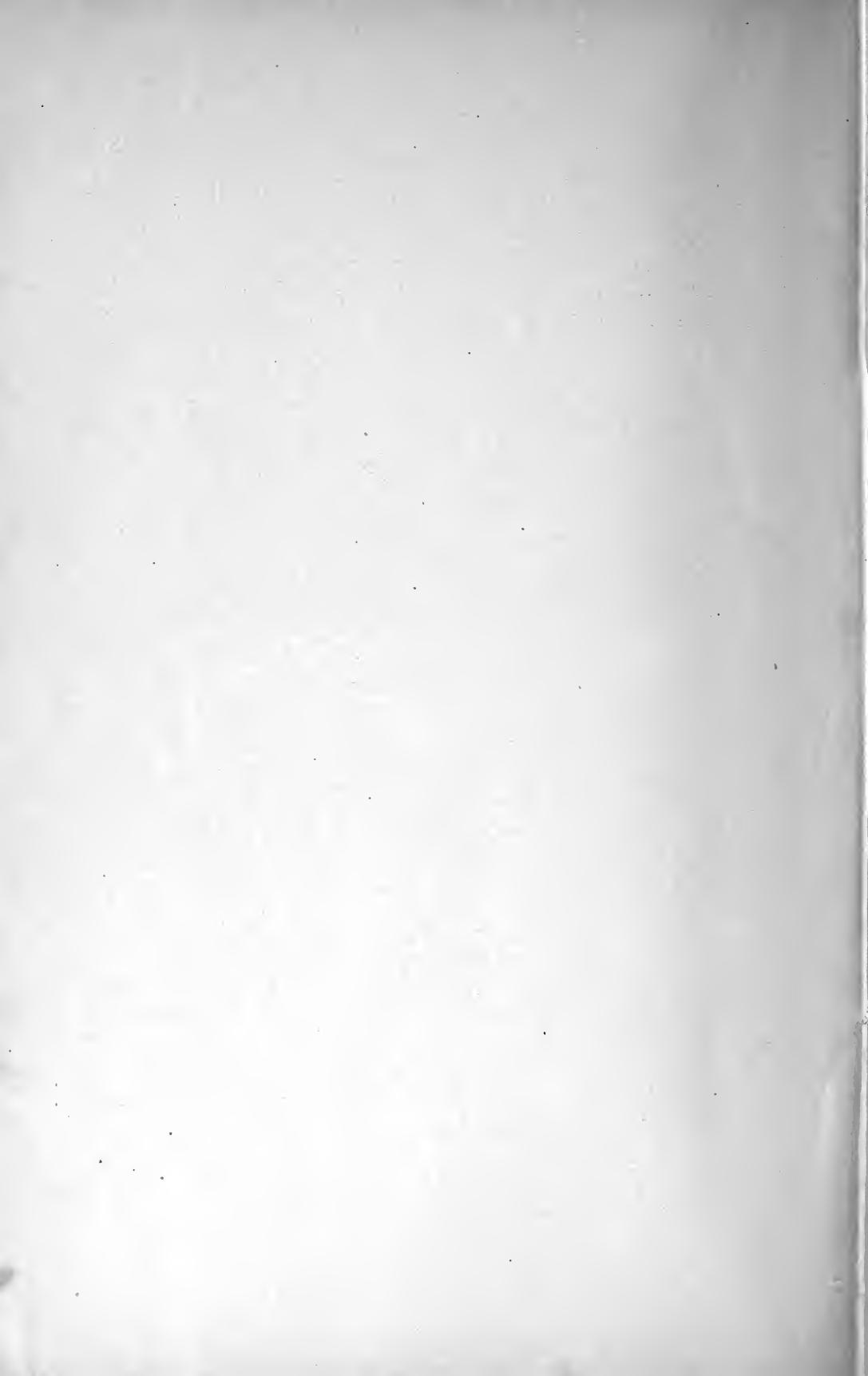
It has long since been observed that the best endowment of a university is the endowment of commanding and noble intellect and character. Such an endowment alone makes a university possible—makes it the center of intellectual light and quickening influence. With such characters this university was blessed in its early history. Whether it has fulfilled the promise of its youth it is not for me to say on this occasion. It is not, however, improper to express the conviction that after years will recognize the fact that even now magnificent work is being done, work that will blossom into beauty and noble achievements. It is one of the infirmities of mankind that character often is not appreciated or understood until it is separated by distance or removed by death. I have myself even yet, after many disappointments, unbounded confidence in the final success of this institution. It is a creature and a child of the state and the age. The training already given here, the young men and women sent forth from these walls into the battle of life, the literary work, and scientific work done here, are an earnest of a glorious future. Students themselves, their character, their

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work, their attainments, their abilities acquired in the studies and literary contests of the university, along with that of the faculty, are a force that must lift this university in the order of nature into a prominence and a power for good, second to no other in the great republic.









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